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ABSTRACT

The role of the college or university president in developing the marketing potential of the institution is discussed. The experience of industry indicates that a marketing viewpoint in an organization will grow only when the president of the organization fully understands its uses and limitations. However, many colleges and universities are failing to develop their marketing potentials because their presidents are mistaking insular admissions, promotion, or development activities for total marketing activities. For higher education, there are nine elements of the marketing activity: admissions, public relations and publications, student retention, counseling, faculty divisions, alumni relations, placement, institutional research, and development. These elements are not being realistically coordinated to focus on the needs of the institutions' clienteles. As the top institutional officer, the president should have a broad perspective relating to current and future growth and should assume responsibility for the coordination of all marketing activities. If higher education is to be productive, every president must be a marketing person, since it is the president's duty to relate the institution's activities to the realities of the client market place and the social/political/economic environment. (SW)

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The Marketing Role of the College or University President

by

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Abstract

The experience of industry indicates that a marketing viewpoint in an organization will grow only when the president fully understands its uses and limitations. Many colleges and universities, in a similar way, are failing to develop their marketing potentials because their presidents are mistaking insular admissions, promotion, or development activities for total marketing activities. As a result, the nine marketing elements in higher education are not being realistically coordinated to focus on the needs of the institution's clienteles. Unless this situation is rectified by the presidents themselves, productivity in higher education will tend to suffer.

In contrast, industry experience indicates that a viable marketing focus develops only when all marketing elements are synchronized with presidential orchestration. For higher education, the specific elements included are:

1. Admissions - Seeking new clients
2. Public Relations and Publications - Creating a general image(s) for the institution and assisting others in the promotion function.
3. Student Retention - Seeking underlying causes for student withdrawl and helping guide those who become dissatisfied with the college or university.
4. Counseling - Providing an overall barometer on the state of student morale, attitudes and beliefs.
5. Faculty Divisions - Promoting faculty understanding of student long and short range needs.
6. Alumni Relations - Promoting the real interests of an important group of clients neglected by many schools.
7. Placement - Finding job opportunities for graduating students and alumni.
8. Institutional Research - Conducting studies which help the college/university perceive the realities of the community around them.
9. Development - Seeking the added funds from donors who see value in the activities, philosophy and image of the school.

Very few, if any, colleges and universities are actively melding these marketing elements together, despite the obvious advantages

Developing a Marketing Focus

Educators in colleges and universities are turning to commercial marketing concepts for help with many of their problems. The overall aim of applying such approaches to the problems of academe, just as for the commercial world, is to help the organization be more responsive to the current and future concerns of its clients. Yet although many educational journals have published articles on marketing since the early 70's, and workshops, conferences, and seminars on the topic have become commonplace, very little attention has been given to the role of the college/university president in this marketing activity. However, the experience of industry indicates that a marketing viewpoint within an organization will grow only when the president understands its use and limitations. It will not be a grass roots movement. Consequently, the marketing role of the college/university president needs to develop, and until it does, productivity in higher education will tend to suffer.*

Part of the problem which constrains development of this marketing role is the fragmented or decentralized way in which institutions function. When academic departments and schools over-emphasize their independence, similarly insular behavior often carries over to such support functions as development, admission, or publications.

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*Comments and conclusions contained in this paper have been developed from the author's research, consulting and publications listed in the bibliography.

that could result (e.g., a consistent image for the institution, a better flow of information between such areas as counseling and admissions, a bridge across the gap that often separates alumni programs and academic departments, and so on).

Three Presidential Postures

Examination of presidential activities indicates that they tend to take one of three narrow postures, which are confused with being marketing oriented. Unfortunately, each of these postures overemphasizes one area of activity; admissions, promotion, or development.

The most common one is being admissions oriented. Here, the president attempts to delegate marketing responsibility to the admissions personnel because the results of admissions work can easily be demonstrated by the number of students recruited. As evidence of this presidential delegation, one can note the large numbers of admissions personnel attending educational marketing conferences. It is as though admissions personnel alone can bring about a marketing posture within the college/university.

Although a critical department, admissions cannot apply marketing concepts to the total college/university and must rely on the eight other marketing functions. For example, admissions must know in advance about academic program changes, changing patterns of placement, ongoing institutional research, and so on.

A second posture involves being promotion oriented. The president here becomes overly enamoured with the potential

of promotional activities (e.g., advertising, public relations) and develops what is referred to in industry as a "selling" approach. Under a selling approach, the president assumes that with sufficient promotional power, desired marketing results can be obtained. In some instances, it can happen. However, the approach most often is not very productive because it is simple application of technique. It does not begin with a basic understanding of the character of the market and of the needs and problems of the client group; the essences of a marketing approach.

These comments on selling should not be construed to indicate that the selling function is redundant, and it should be clear that "nothing happens until a sale is made." However, selling is just one part of a marketing posture and really needs to be integrated with the other elements to be effective. The academic president needs to understand that, in contrast to a selling approach, deeper market understanding involves long range work.

A third posture involves presidents being development oriented. The president here uses selling technique alone for annual giving or for endowment development activity. These techniques are very useful in the development process. However, they usually do not result in effectively marketing the total institution. In addition, these techniques can be counter productive when they are not well integrated with the other marketing activities. For example, development

personnel and placement personnel need to have good communications to present a realistic placement picture to donating business firms and other potential donors. This type of coordination may be overlooked by the development oriented president.

The Benefits

As the top institutional officer, the president should have a broad perspective relating to current and future growth. A marketing viewpoint can help the president refine and develop this perspective. It adds an objective element that supports his/her own innate understanding. The support arises by providing him/her with a constant reference point to the college/university clientele.

Operationally, a presidential marketing viewpoint should result in the organizational bridging of the nine marketing elements. At the very least, it should provide a presidential charter for better coordination and cooperation among them. For instance, the conflict that often exists between admissions and publications department, could be significantly reduced. Alumni relations can provide important information on continuing education needs or graduates and help them to have longer term relationships with the department from which they received their degrees.

As important as leading to such changes in how the organization operates, the marketing viewpoint helps the president focus on such client based questions as, "How are our perceptions of our institution similar/different from

those of potential students?" In turn, this helps focus all activities on the basic mission of the institution instead of its internal operations.

Every President a Marketeer?

In industrial circles, it is accepted that no matter what profession he/she began with, every president must be a marketing person because it is the president's duty to relate the firm's activities to the realities of the client market place and the social/political/economic environment.

The same axiom can be applied to higher education. Considering the declining student market in the 1980's, every academic president should attempt to foster the same type of institutional-environmental relationships. This does not mean trying to cater to educational whims or fads. Rather, it means asking critical marketing oriented questions, helping the institution's support functions to be better integrated, and focusing on problems faced by various clienteles. The result of this effort should be a consistent image of the college/university as an institution that tries to solve the problems of its client groups.

It has been suggested by some that educational marketing efforts can be significantly enhanced by placing marketing trained personnel in various administrative positions such as admissions and development. Others even suggested the development of marketing vice presidents for colleges and universities. However, it is unlikely these types of personnel can significantly impact the substance of educational marketing without a truly marketing oriented president. Yes, the president must be a marketeer!

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